

**Introducing Reef Support:
An Online Marine Park User Fee Payment System**

**Presentación de Reef Support:
Un Sistema de Pago en Línea de Tarifas de Usuario de Parques Marinos**

**Présentation du Reef Support:
Un Système en Ligne de Paiement des Frais d'Utilisation des Parcs Marins**

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ABSTRACT

Dive tourism has been an established method to finance coral reef conservation through user fees which are used to directly fund the management of MPAs. However most organizations in charge of MPA management lack the in house capacity to establish and operate a reliable system to collect user fees. Often traditional ‘over the counter’ systems selling bracelets or tags put enormous pressure and responsibility on water-sport operators and wardens. These systems often lack the necessary control mechanisms and often they become a burden. Based on a feasibility study financed by Bloomberg Philanthropies and conducted by Reef Support BV on Bonaire, Curacao and Sint Maarten, it was determined that 91% of tourists used the internet to pay for and reserve flights, accommodation, rental cars and other marine recreation packages. This reveals a new trend in buying tourism related products that were simply non-existent in the early nineties when user fees became more popular. To gain from this new tendency and to overcome the above described issues, Reef Support created the first online system to collect user fees. Reef Support is a simple, robust, flexible, and customize tool to sell marine park fees to visitors. It offers a safe way to receive money, provides access to an ever-growing database of customers, creates a unique ticketing system, and offers the possibility of generating customized financial reports. This internet-based payment system will help managers streamline sales, help visitors save time, increase the safety of rangers, and utilize technological advances to benefit conservation.

KEYWORDS: Marine Protected Areas, user fees, internet-based payment system

ACTUAL SITUATION

A Gigantic Economic Gap

The total investment in coral reef management and conservation is hard to calculate; recent studies suggest the funds allocated worldwide to implement, enforce and monitor coral reefs conservation in 2016 range from US\$ 350 millions to US\$ 1.9 billions. On the other hand, coral reefs and associated environments, provide US\$ 375 billions from goods and services including US\$ 130 billions for coastal tourism (UN Environment, International Coral Reef Initiative – 2018). This means that for every \$100 that coastal tourism generates, between US\$ 0.27 to US\$ 1.5 is invested in management and conservation. Undeniably, a gigantic economic gap.

USERS FEES

Among many other financial mechanisms, users fees in its different forms, tags, bracelets, voluntarily or mandatory, have been a reliable source of income for a few Marine Protected Areas around the world since the Bonaire National Marine Park first introduce the concept in 1992, but as the numbers above show, this is hardly enough. As obvious as the concept can be seen, the truth is that most organizations in charge of MPA management do not have the in house capacity to establish or operate a reliable system to collect marine park users fees. Beside, traditional “over the counter” system to sell bracelets or tags, put an enormous pressure and responsibility in the recreational water sport providers and wardens. Oftentimes, they lack the required control mechanisms for good NGO’s financial practices and, more often than not, they become a burden.

FEASIBILITY STUDY

A recent feasibility study financed by Bloomberg Philanthropies and conducted by Reef Support on Bonaire, Curacao and Sint Maarten about how tourists use Internet to plan their vacations, shows that as much as 91% of the tourists use internet to buy their ticket, pay or reserve their accommodation, pay or reserve their rental car or reserve their marine recreation package. Those results clearly show a new trend in buying tourism related products that was simply non-existent in early nineties when marine parks users fees start being more popular.

THE SOLUTION

To profit from this new tendency and to overcome the above described issues, Reef Support created the first online system to collect your users fees.

It offers you not only a safe way to receive money but also access to an ever-growing database of your customers, an unique ticketing system customizable to your park and the possibility of generating also customized financial reports.

Main features are:

- i) Simple, robust, flexible and totally customize,
- ii) Ever-growing database,
- iii) Unique ticketing system,
- iv) Easy to enforce by MPA Rangers and tourism operators,
- v) Transparent and accountable financial system,
- vi) Transparent and accountable financial system,
- vii) Includes customized Marine Park orientation ,
- viii) Increase safety,
- ix) Less operator's time investment,
- x) No implementation costs,
- xi) Low operation cost, and
- xii) Includes Operation and Implementation Manual.

With today's technologies, communication and marketing tools, any size organization can compete in the major leagues of fund rising.

Reef Support offers you the perfect tool to market your MPA and access an enormous public through marketing, exposure, and easiness to pay.

If you want to have a look what Reef Support have to offer you, please visit <http://marineparkfee.com/> and ask for a personal demo or contact Reef Support at:

info@reefsupport.org

LITERATURE CITED

UN Environment, International Coral Reef Initiative, UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre. 2018. *Analysis of International Funding for the Sustainable Management of Coral Reefs and Associated Coastal Ecosystems*. Available at: wcmc.io/coralbrochure